

Modern efforts to advance gender equality pose challenges for historically patriarchal religions. Consider the circumcision rite in Judaism, which—since the time of Abraham—has marked a male’s entry into the community. No equivalent ritual for women is prescribed by the Torah. As discussed in Mary D’Angelo’s review of Shaye Cohen’s book *Why Aren’t Jewish Women Circumcised?*, some Jewish feminists have advocated for a female circumcision rite to parallel the long-standing male ritual, while others have claimed that this proposed assimilation to the male model would actually further female oppression. I turn to another patriarchal Western religion to identify religious resources that might clarify why the same proposed ritual (female circumcision) is seen by some as advancing gender equality and by others as hindering it. In *Islam and the Problem of Black Suffering*, Sherman Jackson discusses four Islamic schools of thought and how they would respond to charges of divine racism, given the long-standing oppression of blacks. God’s attributes of omnipotence and omnibenevolence make such enduring suffering difficult to comprehend. Jackson analyzes the differences between the four theological schools in how they interpret God’s omnipotence and omnibenevolence, drawing on a dozen additional concepts to express these diverse theological interpretations of divine responsibility for human suffering. My analysis focuses on the concept of hikmah (divine wisdom)—as well as the primary attributes of omnipotence and omnibenevolence—in two of the four theological schools. Thinking through the lens of each of these theological schools, I come to opposing conclusions regarding the relationship between female circumcision and gender equality. On the one hand, the Maturidite school would perceive female circumcision as having a negative effect on gender equality. If women endure the inequality, God grants an increase in female wisdom as a result of suffering from the oppression that comes with not having an equivalent circumcision practice. On the other hand, Mu’tazilite thought would see female circumcision as beneficial to gender equality; God—in God’s wisdom—has given Jewish women the capacity to choose this action, which must mean that this action will invoke a good outcome for them. The debate about female circumcision in Judaism can be generalized to the oppression of women in diverse cultures and this research offers theological resources for furthering gender equality.